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ABSTRACT

The ideas, practices, and day-to-day impact of parent education should be critically examined, and Michel Foucault's conception of discourse provides a useful model for doing so. Contemporary discourses about becoming a parent achieve their authority in different ways. In contrast to the child care literature by so-called experts earlier in this century, contemporary writers emphasize their neutrality, seeking to increase parent confidence rather than telling parents how to raise their children. These authors use their academic or medical credentials to establish themselves as authorities, and use various stylistic devices to legitimate their points of view. To examine the effects of contemporary parenting literature on the lives and behaviors of parents, an ethnographic study of a New Zealand family was undertaken during the first year after a child was born. The couple had family living nearby and spent time with them. This was in contrast with the norm portrayed by authors of child care books, who feel that their books are necessary substitutes for the advice traditionally given by members of extended families. Interviews with the couple revealed the importance of social context (for example, the attitudes of their peers) to their position with respect to the child-rearing methods recommended by particular authorities. In one instance, authorities, including a professional nurse and parenting books, were used to legitimate the course of action the parents were taking with respect to their child's sleep patterns. It is concluded that future policies and programs of parent education need to be driven by a concern for the social conditions in which the care of children and parent education occurs. (AC)

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Does more equal better, and for whom?

Discourse and practice in Parent Education.

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to examine some of the contemporary discourses of Parent Education in the literature concerned with the care of babies and children. The analysis is informed by the work of Foucault. Ethnographic material gathered during time spent with one family over the first year of their child's life is drawn on to explore how these discourses are experienced in the lives of parents. It is argued that such an analysis is important to foster a critical tradition in the area of Parent Education, and so that future policy and programmes for Parent Education are not formulated in the abstract.

The contradictory effects of education have been clearly articulated with regard to education in general. "Education" is understood to be a means of social production, with effects ranging from social reproduction and control, to social change and emancipation. This recognition of the contradictory outcomes of education has given rise to a vigourous critical tradition in the literature addressing the education of children and young people and some forms of adult education. However, there is a surprising lack of critical writing within the field of parent education, and more generally the dominant assumption appears to be that "more equals better". This is reflected in the frequency with which "more" parent education is invoked as the panacea for all our social ills. However, it is because parent education is so frequently cited as the solution to such diverse social problems that I believe we need to critically examine the ideas and practices of parent education, and to ask what is effected in daily lives by these ideas and practices. In the analysis that follows I examine some of the ways in which contemporary discourses surrounding becoming a "parent" achieve their authority (1). To consider how these discourses are experienced in the lives of particular individuals I draw on ethnographic material from a family I have worked with during the first year of their first child's life (2). The main focus of the analysis is the issue of infant's sleep at night. Although this is a very specific issue to use as a springboard for considering Parent Education in general, I trust that the analysis will support my belief that there is a great deal to be gained from working in detail with concrete examples from people's lived experience.

In the material that follows my ideas have been influenced by Michel Foucault, a French thinker who devoted much of his intellectual life to exploring the realms of discourse. Put most simply, Foucault (1980) used "discourse" to refer to any set of regulating statements which govern the way we live our lives and think about our social world. It needs to be stressed that in this context "statement" refers to meaning as it is expressed in language and also to meaning as it is conveyed in the way that things are done (3). Foucault proposed a method of social analyses based on this understanding of discourse which he referred to as the genealogical method. This involves the identification of various discourses and the location of them in the broader context of those practices with a tendency towards normalisation (Foucault, 1979). Examining the political role played by the social sciences in the definition and dissemination of normalising practices is a crucial part of this process. This means we need to consider the ways in which knowledge about Parent Education, including research about Parent Education, inscribes, not merely describes, what is considered "the norm".

There are several features of Foucault's conception of discourse that I have found particularly useful. Firstly it offers the possibility of thinking of discursive fields, such as that of parent education, as being constituted by discourses which may be discontinuous and contradictory. As will become evident in the analysis that follows this provides a way of making sense of ideas and practices that may co-exist at the same time but seem to be driven by opposing philosophies. Secondly it offers the possibility of considering the range of subject positionings that are articulated by different discourses, and the possibility of considering the ways in which individuals experience multiple and contradictory subjectivities. This opens up the opportunity to consider the ways in which individuals may experience different moments and aspects of their lives in conflict. Thirdly, as already noted, Foucault's conception of discourse proposes that the social space in which we live and the possibilities it offers are formed not just through the expression of ideas and meaning in language but also in the manner in which things are said and done. As an extension of this conception of discourse Foucault (1980) argued that discourses did not simply produce meaning and various ways of thinking but they also produce and constrain the ways in which we experience the world through our bodies. In contrast with other understandings of discourse, which concentrate on what is said, this particular conception of discourse focuses on meaning as it is articulated in language and in practices, and so leads towards an understanding of embodied lived experience.

However, it is not clear from Foucault's work why individuals accept some discourses and resist others. Why is it for example that some mothers give authority to "statements" made by Plunket Nurses while others contest these? Why do some fathers feel at ease with the practices of groups such as Parent Centre Antenatal Classes and others feel alienated? Foucault (1972) argued that our analyses should be focussed on situations in which there is systematic institutionalised justification of certain meanings. However, I have argued elsewhere that to explore the ways in which meanings become embodied in our experiences and give rise to particular subjectivities we need to return to the nebulous ground of the mundane experiences of our everyday life (Loveridge, 1989). We need to explore the interplay between previous lived experience and discourse and what people then make of discourse.

In his later work Foucault (1979) insisted that the production of knowledge is not only historically and socially located but inextricably linked with power in a formative sense. In other words he saw power not merely as a negative force or oppressive practices but linked with the production of the social world through the construction and legitimation of particular discourses and practices. In the context of Parent Education this means examining the construction of statements which regulate the care of infants and children and the lives of their caregivers, and examining how these statements are legitimated and achieve their authority. This particular understanding of the nature of knowledge and power means that for Foucault "the real political task in a society such as ours is to criticise the working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticise them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked so that one can fight them." (Foucault, 1974:187). Thus it is not just a matter of "taking account" of the social and political situation and motivation of the producers of knowledge; the task is to recognize the link between knowledge and power and to ask what is effected by particular claims to truth. This particular approach is concerned with the architecture and staging of knowledge and the nature of social relations inherent in the staging of that knowledge. The questions we need to ask then are concerned with the establishing the rules which allow particular statements to emerge and identifying the devices employed to generate and buttress authoritative knowledge and social and political arrangements: What can be said? What cannot be said? Who has the authority to speak? How is this authority achieved? Which ideas are assumed to be fundamental? What are the arguments which are valued? Which are excluded? Who listens? (4)

In essence, in the material that follows I am interested in establishing the ways in which contemporary statements about parent education establish their neutrality, their independence and their authority, and examining what is effected by their particular claims to truth (5). Historical work on the ideology of motherhood has revealed that in the period from the turn of the century until the early 1950s the dominant statements governing the practices of those caring for the young emanated from the medical profession. These statements clearly nominated mothers as those who listen to and carry out the advice. Primarily the development of the child was construed as a biological process about which the doctor knew best, with "mothers" instincts, the experience of female relatives and neighbours being discredited. Although doctors were initially accorded the status of expert in the area of infant feeding practices, their status as expert quickly extended to other matters such as sleep, handling of infants, toilet training, bathing and discipline (Apple, 1987; Reiger, 1985).

By contrast, contemporary discourses in parent education constitute the practice of parenting as a psychological matter for both parents and children, and nominate "parents" as those who will listen to and carry out the advice. In identifying this shift in the discursive formation I am not wanting to argue that it signifies a complete rupture but rather that psychological discourses have become dominant. In so far as biological ideas are foundational to both medical and psychological discursive formations there are continuities as well as discontinuities and contradictions. This is illustrated clearly in the policy put forward by the New Zealand Board of Health Committee on Child Health Parenting (February 1988). It lists the child's needs as physical and psychological. The physical are dealt with as a list: "healthy food, adequate clothing, appropriate shelter, good sanitation, enough space and safe, yet challenging opportunities for play and other experiences" (p.9). The psychological needs are detailed in six paragraphs dealing with the following: social relationships, healthy emotional development, the modelling of values and beliefs by parents, the need for intellectual stimulation, the need for mastery over the body, parents role in children's learning.

Books on childcare that were referred to by the people who participated in my research primarily construct the care of infants as a psychological problem. Some of the authors locate their advice clearly within a developmental framework, others emphasise a skills based approach, while some combine both (5). For example, Penelope Leach, author of Baby and Child argues that

> "The more you understand him and recognise his present position on the developmental map that directs him towards being a person, the more interesting you will find him." (Leach, 1988:8).

In a book titled Nighttime Parenting, William Sears advocates a style of parenting he refers to as "attachment parenting". Sears argues that

> "parents who practice the attachment style of parenting know their children well. They are observant of their infants cues, respond to them intuitively and are confident their responses are appropriate. They have realistic expectations of their child's behaviour at various stages of development, and they know how to convey expected behaviour to their child." (Sears, 1985:8).

Kate Birch, author of Positive Parenting argues against an ages and stages approach as she believes it prevents parents from seeing the children as themselves and hence hinders them in "helping children to develop their potential". Instead she offers a

> "system of child management designed to help children become 'their own people'; it is not a system for controlling children, but rather a system for developing potential in both parents and children."(Birch, 1984:2).

Christopher Green, author of Toddler Taming, draws on both developmental understandings and skills;

> "To enjoy toddlerhood you need to know what to expect, then tuck some toddler taming techniques up your sleeve and go for it" (Green, 1990:10).(6)

There are many other "sources" that could be considered in making this argument, for example the material presented in antenatal classes, community based parent education courses, representations of parenting in advertising and film, other research on the experiences of first-time parents etc.(7). However, to extend the analysis in this way is beyond the scope of this paper. The focus of this paper is to establish the architectural devices that empower contemporary authors to define the normative dimensions of people's parenting practice. How does the knowledge that is currently presented to parents gain it's authority? How does it appear to be both neutral and independent? There are three main devices which I have isolated for the purposes of this analysis, however they are clearly interrelated.

I. THE EXPERT NON-EXPERT:

In a curious contrast with the literature that was directed at parents earlier in this century that clearly indicated that "doctor knows best", contemporary writers establish their authority by emphasising their neutrality. In various words, they claim they are not another "expert" telling you how to do it, rather their aim is to increase parents confidence. Some authors refer to a general sense of confidence while others refer to the confidence parents have in their instincts or commonsense.

Penelope Leach writes in her introduction "So although this is a book, it will not suggest that you do things 'by the book', but rather that you do them always by the baby" (Leach, 1988:8). Kate Birch writes

> "Positive Parenting was written with the aim of putting parents back in the driving seat. Over the last few years parents have been bombarded with the 'shoulds' and 'oughts' of parenting. This book has tried to offer a variety of techniques

together with the message that no one else can tell you what is best for your family." (Birch, 1984:94).

William Sears puts it this way

> "Cosleeping was common in the western world until the twentieth century when mothers lost confidence in their own instincts and followed the advice of a few influential but misguided experts." (Sears, 1985:35).

Sears in fact explicitly discredits the view that the doctor knows best:

> "Where baby should sleep is not a medical question requiring a medical decision... When it comes to mother-infant attachments your instincts should be followed above the advice of anyone else." (Sears, 1985:37).

Christopher Green goes even further: he wonders "if all us experts were to be blown from the face of the earth, would parents be any worse off." (Green, 1990:5). Green also uses humour to disguise the fact the he does himself put forward some strongly expressed opinions about toddlers, life and the universe! For example Green's "five ingredients" are listed after the following paragraph.

> "Most of what has come and gone before was little less than an orgy of academic nitpicking but behind this glitzy window dressing of childcare there are hidden some solid and vitally important ideas. It is these ideas which provide the foundation for strong and emotionally secure children." (Green, 1990:1).

II. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CREDENTIALS:

Credentials in the field are nonetheless established. It is interesting to note that although Green and Sears stress the problems with experts and their opinions the most, both of them have their medical qualifications on the covers of their books, and both refer to their "practices", which we are to understand as "medical practices", on the first pages of their respective texts. Penelope Leach has a paragraph on the first page which lists her academic qualifications, including a Phd in Social Psychology, followed by her areas of research, professional experience and affiliations in the field of child development, and other published books and videos. These are not referred to in the text itself. Kate Birch has a section of acknowledgements in the front which indicate that her work has been supported and sponsored by various institutions such as the Mental Health Foundation. She also refers to her work in a Child Development Centre in the first pages, and has a small paragraph about herself at the end of the book indicating she is a trained psychologist, has ten years of experience working with families and parent groups, and was Executive Director of the Human Rights Commission.

The author's own experience as a parent, and the experiences of other parents they have had contact with are also used to establish credibility. Green's opening lines are

> "I used to think I was a real expert on child care, but that was before I had children myself. When my boisterous boys arrived I discovered how little I knew, and how out of touch and impractical was the vast majority of child care information of the day" (Green, 1990:v).

A few paragraphs later, referring to the second edition of his book he states:

> "We are now in the 1990s and my ideas have become much stronger, clearer and more effective. So they should as I have talked to over 50,000 parents since Toddler Taming was first published."

Penelope Leach vouches for the trustworthiness of her advice in the following way.

> "So a large part of this book is devoted to helping you to find ways that work for you. Some of them came directly to me from my own mother; some of them were learned the hard way on my own children; most of them come from the thousands of other parents who let me watch them coping." (Leach, 1988:15).

William Sears explains that he had learnt through his experience in his medical practice and his wife's and his

> "struggle to develop our own parenting style... that most problems in child rearing do not have easy answers ... then one day a wise colleague took me aside and confided that when he wanted to know the answer to a difficult question on parenting he asked an experienced, intuitive mother Eureka! Over the next twelve years this is just what I did. I learned form experienced mothers" (Sears, 1985:xiv).

Further on he adds "Paediatricians are not uniquely blessed with easy sleepers. I, too, have spent many hours in nighttime fathering" (Sears, 1985:xvi). Kate Birch acknowledges

> "Many people helped to make Positive Parenting. First and foremost the parents of Taranaki, who helped me to learn about parenting."(Birch, 1984:vi).

III. STATEMENTS ABOUT SOCIETY AND CULTURE:

The third device that I want to consider is the use of general statements about the nature of society and other cultures to legitimate the point of view of the author. Again, there is an interesting contradiction here. Global statements are made about the changes that have occurred in the nature of our own society, suggesting that this is why such parent education material is needed but very little is said about the diversity that exists within our society, and the implications of this for the way that people parent. Penelope Leach suggests that she is passing on "a complex and entrancing folklore of childcare which, once upon a time, you might have received through your own extended family." (Leach, 1988:15). Green writes "The breakdown of the extended family has left many new parents isolated and uncertain" (Green, 1990:2). William Sears argues "Parent burn-out is seldom the fault of the child. It is the fault of a society in which there has been a breakdown of the extended family, the parents' traditional support system."(Sears, 1985:xv). Interestingly, none of these writers provide any evidence to support their contention that there has been a breakdown of the extended family, and that as a consequence families feel unsupported today. While some of the books include special chapters on the situation of single-parent families there is no sustained analysis of the wide variety of social situations in which people find themselves parenting. The issues which are addressed by the authors seem abstracted from the details of people's daily lives. The texts are written as if the reader is a blank slate, bringing nothing to their reading. It is as if the material is directed at a person who is essentialised as "the parent who wishes to do the best for their child". Very little is written about the ways in which different social and cultural conditions give rise to a myriad of ways in which it is possible to care for an infant or child.

Likewise references to practices of parenting in other cultures are made to legitimate the view being put forward by the author, and again these references tend to be made in very global manner without considering the details of the context in which the practice occurs (8). An interesting example of this which has received attention in New Zealand recently is the practice of infants and children sleeping with their parents. A number of books advocate "family beds" and refer to this as a practice that is popular in other cultures. For example under a heading titled "Cultural Programming" William Sears writes "Isn't sleeping with a baby an unusual custom? Actually just the opposite is true. Babies sleeping with parents is the usual custom in most cultures around the world." (Sears, 1985:35). In contrast with those books advocating family beds, recent publications from the National Children's Health Research Foundation have recommended that to lessen the chance of cot death "Babies should sleep by themselves, not in a bed with others, but should be in the same room as the parents for the first six months". This recommendation was featured in the magazine Little Treasures (9) and generated a number of letters in which several of the writers referred to cosleeping being a common practice in other cultures. One writer

referred to the statements that have been made about the value of sleeping with your baby by "respected paediatricians such as Dr Eric (sic) Sears". A letter was also published by Dr Shirley Tonkin, National Co-ordinator of the Cot Death Division of the National Children's Health Research Foundation in which she examined in more detail the specific circumstances of "bed-sharing" in other cultures, and contrasted these with the features of the European style bed.

Clearly there are other stylistic devices that are used to legitimate the knowledge that is presented by these authors. However I would now like to move on and begin to consider how these discourses are experienced in the lives of people who live many different social relations. For the purposes of this paper I have restricted my analysis to some of the interview material that one couple and I produced as we talked about their baby's sleep (10). In the period in which medical discourse dominated the literature on the care of infants, sleep was spoken of in terms of scheduling, with regularity and repetition being the prime concern. In the contemporary literature, dominated by psychological discourse, there are two competing categories of regulating statements which can be metaphorically contrasted as the "holistic" and the "behaviourist". In terms of the books referred to in this paper, Sears advice on the sleep of infants and children falls within the holistic approach. "Nighttime Parenting" is one of the practices of a total parenting style he refers to as "Attachment Parenting" which includes creating a peaceful womb experience, breast feeding with child led weaning, responding promptly to baby's cries, travelling as a father-mother-baby unit (Sears, 1985:2-6). Green's advice on the sleep of infants and children falls within the behaviourist approach. He refers to his technique as the Green Controlled Crying Technique which he describes as follows

> "Controlled crying refers to my method of letting children cry for a short period, then coming in to give some, but not full comfort, letting them cry a little longer each time, giving more incomplete comfort, gradually increasing the crying time between comforting until eventually they say: 'I know she loves me, I know she will always come but it is just not worth all the effort'." (Green, 1990:125).

The book that is referred to in the following material as "The Sleep Book" is based on the same idea of leaving infants and children who are not sleeping when they should be to cry (11).

The people's experience I will be drawing on in the material that follows I will call Liz and Peter, and their baby Russell (12). At the time Russell was born Liz was 28 and Peter 30. Liz and Peter have lived in Palmerston North all their lives. Liz's immediate family, and a large number of her extended family all live in Palmerston North. Peter's parents immigrated to New Zealand in the early 1950s. He has no extended family here, but some of his siblings and his father live in Palmerston North. The other brothers and sisters live in New Zealand. Peter and Liz feel that they are in quite close contact with their family members, particularly those living in Palmerston North. When I first met Liz she was working as a nurse. She took parental leave, and then when Russell was about 6 months she began working the equivalent of one day a week. Peter initially had a job driving, which took him away from home 13 hours every day. When Russell was around 5 months Peter became self-employed, which meant working fewer hours in a day and more flexibility in the hours worked. Before Russell was born both Peter and Liz attended Antenatal Classes and both of them had read a number of books about birth and childcare. Throughout the year Liz continued to read widely and discussed what she read with Peter. Liz also attended La Leche meetings and joined a support group that had formed informally. A number of their family members, friends and church members have had babies and they felt they had spent quite a lot of time before Russell was born observing people with children.

One of the reasons for considering this family's experiences is that they do have family close by and they do spend time with their respective families. Their situation contrasts with the "norm" as it has been portrayed by the authors of the childcare books examined in this paper. As I have previously shown, these authors argued that the advice they were giving was necessary because people were no longer receiving it from their extended families, implying that if people were in a position to receive advice from the "traditional" source it would be the same as that offered in their book. However, in legitimating their authorial position in this way there is no space for any extensive discussion about the ways in which the social world in which the present generation of parents live offers different possibilities and constraints

in they way they care for their children. On the one hand the authors have used "social change" to buttress their authority, but in doing so they effectively precluded other statements about social change. Generally the parents participating in the research were quite clear that some of their practices were consciously modelled on those of their parents but some things they did were quite consciously different. Reflecting on the way that she and Peter were going about raising Russell Liz said,

> Liz: "I haven't asked Mum a lot of advice along the way, I think I've tended to take it from people who are um...had more children of my own age group now. I've looked up to them rather than that generation back."
>
> J.L: "What sorts of things do you think that generation have done differently?
>
> Liz: "This whole routine thing, very regimented on that one and a lot more bottle feeding and introducing solids earlier, I used to get liver juice and things like that given to me when I was three and four months old in my Plunket Book, I mean I wouldn't dream of doing things like that to Russell."

In another interview Liz had also mentioned the matter of not asking about things from her mother.

> Liz: "I haven't asked Mum much, um, I think that generation, I mean a lot of things don't change but that generation had totally different ideas to our day and age and so I don't tend to ask her much."

Clearly though what has been done by the previous generation still exerts an influence, even if it results in something being done in contrast with what had been done before. At another point in explaining why she had initially bathed Russell in the morning Liz said,

> Liz: "Because I think I was sort of struggling in my mind with the parent's generation and how they in the Plunket books had 6, 10, 2, 6, and 10 they'd do things for the babies and they would always give them a morning bath..."

In the second interviews that I did with Peter and Liz when Russell was about six weeks old, Liz and Peter had just started having Russell sleep with them in their bed. Liz described Russell as a "very wakeful baby" and it could be anywhere between 9.00 and 1.00 am before he went to sleep. At this stage they mentioned they were concerned that Peter might fall asleep at the wheel during his daily 13 hours driving. Liz, Peter and Russell had been away on holiday with Liz's family. It was a small house that they stayed in and Liz and Peter were worried that Russell's crying would wake the other family members so they had taken him into their bed to sleep. On their return home they had tried putting Russell in his bassinet at night but after some difficulty getting him to sleep they ended up having him in bed with them. Liz described their feelings about it in the following words,

> Liz: " ...Well it's something that we're struggling and working through at the moment because not many people do it, or not many people talk about it and you don't like to tell very many people that you do it 'cos they'll think Oh you know what a funny couple Peter and Liz are...And you'd get used to it and they'll start to you know judge or ... our parenting and so we only just...I've been reading a book about it called Nighttime Parenting and that's really good, and I agree with what it says and I think you know I'd still like him in my own mind to be able to sleep in his bassinet and with us, but be able to do both, not just get totally used to us, but I don't know what's going to happen, we'll just play it by ear".

Later on in the interview Liz was talking about the books she had been reading she returned to Nighttime Parenting.

> Liz: "Right, it's only a cultural thing. I mean these primitive cultures have their babies with them all the time. They carry them with them, they have them everywhere and it's just our culture and society that say that your baby should be in a room on

its own at night, when you know it just...to me it just seems so stupid when it's been part of you for nine months and then all of a sudden there's that separation. Yeah, there's a lot of ... a lot that ... a lot that it involves but I agree with a lot of it..." (13)

In an interview with Peter at the same period he referred to discussing the book that Liz had been reading. He also commented,

Peter:. ...the time is going to come when we're just going to have to say to people listen you know he sleeps in our bed and he feeds when he wants to feed and um you know they can either like it or lump it because its our baby and you know we've got his best interests at heart and if his best interest is that he sleeps in our bed and that he feeds when he wants to well that's our perogative not theirs."

When I interviewed Peter and Liz when Russell was 6 months where Russell slept was no longer an issue. At this stage he was mainly sleeping in his own room, though spent the occasional night with Peter and Liz. As Liz put it,

Liz: "Yeah we sort of still do a bit of both but it's not an issue now ... we're comfortable and its working for us so.."

The nature of the preoccupation at this stage was that Russell had been waking 2-3 times a night. From the way Peter and Liz talked it was evident that they had discussed leaving Russell to cry. When I asked if they had talked about this Peter said yes, and went on to say,

Peter: " Never works, well we have never left him for any long period of time and we don't really intend to...because um if they're distressed about something we still think that at the age he's at, 6 months, it's still hard for him to distinguish between what he wants and what he needs. In talking to the Plunket Nurse last time, last week too, she said there's no point really trying to train them into sleep patterns before they're about nine months old..."

When I interviewed Liz when Russell was 9 months she and Peter had changed what they were doing in terms of getting Russell to sleep. Before the interview itself Liz had mentioned "the sleep book" so during the interview I asked her how she had come across it.

Liz: "Um, through friends at church, you know and I used to think...the pastor and his wife sort of mentioned it one day that they'd tried it on their kids and I thought ... I know it was pretty radical from what I'd I think I sensed through La Leche, cos it's not one of their recommended reading books and um it was against their philosophies and the pastor and his wife used it and I thought Oh, oh gosh, you know fancy them using that book and I thought Oh if it's alright for them, it's alright for us, it was funny I did think that. And we borrowed if from friends and I thought oh I'll just read it, you know, and that'll be it and the night we went away with friends whose daughter slept through the night and then they said after Russell in the next morning "Oh he's just like a newborn baby" I sort of had him in and out of my bed all the time with me, my sleeping bag, we were in a camp, and I thought after that...that night made me think Right OK we're going to try it out on you, so we just did and it did work and then I felt a conflict of you know the La Leche people because I know they wouldn't do anything like that"

JL: And so what happened when you felt that conflict, how did you resolve it?

Liz: I didn't (laughing) I just avoided it, I didn't sort of say anything about it to them or anyone from there I wouldn't sort of talk much about letting Russell cry or using it, I just wouldn't mention it. So it wasn't really resolved, it was just sort of brushing it under the mat. We can't let Russell rule our lives so I want to tend to you know draw back from some of the things they believe in and intervene a bit earlier than they would.

Isolating sleep in this way is clearly artificial. There are many more excerpts from the interviews that I would like to be able to share, to try and give more of an indication of the subtleties and complexities that were involved in this process of Peter and Liz reflecting on their practice of parenting. I do not wish to generalise from this one family's experience at this particular period to the situation of parents in general. However I believe that although this material addresses a very specific issue (ie. babies sleep at night) it does provide some interesting insights which should be considered in thinking about Parent Education more generally.

The interview material illustrates the way in which people may be positioned by various discourses through their sense of affiliation to different social groups. Liz sensed this herself as she reflected on her feelings about what the La Leche people would think of the practices advocated in The Sleep Book, and that she had thought that if it was alright for the pastor and his family to use the book, then it was OK for them. This particular moment in the interview material provides us with an interesting example of the way in which it is possible to live with contradiction and conflict. It is also revealing that despite the way I have thought about and conceptualised the research my immediate reaction was to ask Liz how she had resolved the conflict, as if all conflict must be resolved in the interests of a unified sense of self. The use and counter-use of statements by authority to justify certain practices is also illuminated in this material. Peter found it useful to draw on the knowledge of the Plunket Nurse in legitimating the course of action he and Liz were following. Liz made reference to the other sources of authority that she encountered through the groups she belonged to and the reading she did. However, they both also recognised the ways in which their practices could become constrained by what is considered "the norm" and that this may not be in their or Russell's best interests. Overall, this particular material provides a sense of the way in what seems possible, what seems not possible and what seems necessary is shaped by the material constraints and social context in which people live out their daily lives.

Without doubt there will continue to be many forms of Parent Education, and many calls for more Parent Education. The insights gained from the analysis of contemporary literature for parents and the interviews with Peter and Liz lead me to suggest that what is needed is not more Parent Education but the fostering of a critical tradition of Parent Education. A critical approach to Parent Education would reflect an understanding of education as part of the processes of cultural production and reproduction. The skills and understandings which it would work towards would be those which would assist mothers and fathers in examining what is effected by particular practices in the context of their daily lives. Future policy and programmes for parent education need to be driven by a concern for the social conditions in which the care of children and parent education occurs and to recognise that people are positioned through various discourses, some of which relate to their social relation as mother or father. Individual subjects are not blank slates nor are they passive...but clearly the social conditions in which individuals live both produce and constrain what seems possible.

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FOOTNOTES

(1) Busfield (1987:67) correctly argues that "the significance of parenthood is not the same for the two genders, a point which the recently fashionable term 'parenting' ignores". However, I have used parents because particular discourses are articulated in terms of "parents" and "parenting". I trust that the context in which this has been done with make clear that it is understood that the experiences of individuals and groups of individuals differ.

(2) This material comes from my PhD research. The main purpose of the research has been to examine the play of discourses surrounding becoming a "mother", "father" or "parent" in the context of the lived experience of particular individuals. The design of the research has been twofold:

1. An examination of the discourses which constitute academic and popular literature, social policy, institutional practices, social practices and media representations.

2. An ethnographic study with 8 couples who have become parents for the first time, using interviews, participant observation, schedules for recording daily activities, and video to focus on the practices of these first time parents within their social and material world.

(3) Foucault's The history of sexuality (volume 1) provides an interesting example of the way in which Foucault attempted to use the concept of discourse in a concrete analysis. For readers interested in the development of Foucault's ideas, and debates surrounding what particular concepts have meant in the context of particular works by Foucault there are now many texts available. Particularly useful is Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics by H.L. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (Sussex, 1982). In what follows I am more interested in the possibilities offered by Foucault's work than teasing out the particular nuances, inconsistencies etc.

(4) These questions are adapted from a very useful article by Cherryholmes.

(5) In taking this approach I am not wishing to devalue the extent to which people may find books written for parents very useful and necessary. My concern is to understand how advice given by an expert becomes accepted as legitimate and used to justify certain practices in a way that the advice given by my local mechanic, electrician, mailperson, beekeeper or retired neighbour (all of whom have given me very helpful advice) does not, even though that advice may be the same.

(6) There are numerous books that have been written to aid parents in the process of raising their children. In this paper I have restricted the analysis to books which the people participating in my research referred to.

(7) It is interesting to note though that the parents involved in my research frequently used psychological terms in expressing their concerns and describing the way they cared for their infants. For example, one mother in responding to my question "What are the things that you are most likely to discuss with regard to Jamie" responded "We talk about his developmental stages and activities. We talk about those more than anything".

(8) This is not an argument against the use of ethnography and knowledge about practices in other cultures, rather it is a concern about the manner in which the material is used.

(9) Little Treasures is a magazine published in New Zealand by Treasure's Baby Club. "Treasure's" are a brand of baby care products, most well known for their disposable nappies. The recommendations of the Cot Death Division of the National Children's Health Research Foundation were published in Little Treasures issue 21, and the correspondence to which I refer was published in volume 23.

(10) At the period in which I was doing these interviews I was not myself a parent but hoped to have children in the future. It will be necessary to consider how that has influenced the material that I

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and the people that I interviewed produced. At the time, I was aware that my positioning as "not-a-parent" allowed me to ask questions which may have seemed rather obvious but which I hoped would enable me to come to some understanding about the details of people's practices as parents. Subsequently, on the basis of my own experience as a mother I have become aware of the ways in which my practices as a mother have at some moments felt far more richly detailed than I could ever begin to describe, and at other moments so habitual that I have difficulty in isolating them. I did certainly not appreciate this at the time of the interviews.

(11) Ideally I would have included material from "The Sleep Book" in the preceeding analysis. I have had difficulty in obtaining a copy and so have not been able to do so.

(12) These names are pseudonyms which I have used to protect the identity of the people involved in my fieldwork. In deciding what biographical material to present I have selected material that seems relevant to the material I wish to discuss in this paper. Other biographical material which I have access to I have not included. I am aware that unfortunately this may result in the people I am referring to seeming to be "stick figures". The main reason for doing this is that in a community the size of Palmerston North people are able to be identified as participants in this type of research. This may not be an issue for this particular couple but I had to decide on an initial protocol for all the participants. At the beginning of the research I indicated that unless participants chose for it to be otherwise I would do all I could to protect their anonymity.

(13) At the time of the interview I had not seen the book Nighttime Parenting and did not understand what Liz was referring to when she indicated that there was a lot that it involves. Subsequently I have realised that she was probably referring to the overall style of parenting that Sears describes as "attachment" parenting.

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